

This question of fairness speaks to how we see ourselves as a community. Are we united and working together as a whole? Or, are we divided and focused on oppositional conflicts? Do we draw lines and separate one side from another? I am sad to report that it appears to me that we are a town divided. This started early on.

Let's state clearly for the record that the community of Princeton was in existence long before the University arrived here. Early settlers followed the established trails of the Lenape and settled along our local streams in the late 1600's and early 1700s.

You know, it is curious to me how in this town people always introduce themselves by their name immediately followed by the numbers of years they have lived here or better yet by asserting that they are native born! I assume it is done as a sly way to suggest that those with longer membership in the "Princeton club" have greater say – but whatever the motivation – the Town came before the gown, both following the moccasin footsteps.

Not that the University was too far behind; indeed in the 1750's they were ahead of the curve on urban flight and they left Elizabeth for our leafy paradise.

The first 100 years followed with the more or less equal growth of the Theological Seminary, Princeton University and the Borough of Princeton as we see in this slide. I believe the heart and soul of Princeton was forged in these early years. Indeed our self image sometimes is still nostalgically focused back at this 1874 print.

The twentieth Century changed all of that. The first half was faced with struggles of segregation between the black and white community with the black community often getting pushed farther and farther north from the edges of Nassau Street. Uptown was fully segregated, blacks had their own businesses in their own neighborhood and Edgar Palmer, a University Trustee and funder

of Palmer Square did everything he could to remake his “downtown” in a white enclave of historicist stone architecture harmonizing with the Campus and not the lost streets of Baker and Jackson.

The pace during the second half of the 20th century was amazing in terms of the growth of Princeton University. This growth was fueled in part by the University’s investment strategies of developing Forrestal Village and cutting up nearby nursery and farm lands along Route 1 into office parks in the 1980’s in order that Fortune 500 companies (and 500 wannabes) could get themselves a piece of the 08540 pie for the price of a five year lease. As these new office complexes filled up with new employees they created a high demand for new and in some cases, renovated housing stock.

As prices escalated and growth failed to keep up with demand, this of course lead to a new commuting and driving culture centered around Princeton as each wave of new employees was faced with looking farther to the west, south and east to locate housing they could afford resulting in our being mired in a car centric culture that suburbia inevitably dictates.

The last decade of the 20th Century saw the coffers of the University filled with all of the monies generated by their newly built office park holdings. They went on a huge building binge on campus so they could attract more + better faculty and more + better students and more + better visiting fellows and more and who knows if better weekend tourists visiting Princeton. From 1996 until 2006, the size of the University’s Campus increased by 17% or 1.4 million square feet.

Not sated by that building binge, Princeton University has now released a campus plan that will add over 2.1 million square feet of space to the campus over the next 10 years and this new 21%

growth spurt will again radically change our traffic and mass transportation choices.

What effect will that growth have on the other half of the community? The half, I might add that pays 90% of the property taxes?

Well, let's look at the past effects since the 1980's. As the demand for housing grew, prices started a steep escalation that only stopped in 2006. For over twenty-four years, excepting about 6 years during that run, real estate values escalated rapidly, often in double digits annually and for 4-5 of those years, we saw over 20% price escalation.

You know the routine: as new housing is built to meet demand (or simply to profit in an escalating market) and the parallel accompanying demand for additional governmental services is felt. Schools, police, fire protection, public works, parks and recreation, all of these budgets have to increase to accommodate greater demands placed by a growing population of Princeton University and a changing dynamic of visitors that they attract.

As our property taxes go up to pay for this increasing demand we undeniably change the face of our community. This new high cost structure tears the fabric of our precious and diverse society such that those who are teenagers, blue collar workers, single adults with no families, retirees & senior citizens who have raised their families in town, fixed income or subsistence income families, disabled, municipal and school employees, clerical and mid level office staff employees, non-for profit and NGO staff employees, artists, and new immigrants lacking existing support networks can't afford to live in Princeton. Renters suffer, entry level homebuyers suffer and the landlords who charge exorbitant downtown rents – meaning the developers and Princeton

University and the legendary slumlords of Birch and Leigh Avenues – they all profit.

In addition, the social compact that American Democracy has so carefully put together comes undone when dire financial stress is associated with every personal decision about government and taxes. Now we hear that people don't want to pay for services that they do not use. "I don't have any children in the school system, so why should I pay school taxes?" "I didn't have a fire last year, so why should I donate to the fire budget?" I know you think these arguments are facile, but they are only a tiny step away, logically speaking, from the argument that Princeton University makes that they should only pay for the costs of the services provided to the University. The fact that they can make that argument and float it in our town and have it gain currency such that people think that would be enough shows just how much our expectations for civil excellence have been beaten down by the University paid professional lobbyists.

Let me return to our parallel Town and Gown narratives. This dual opposition of competing and different needs leads to two narratives; each side has their own story to tell. But the oppositional nature of these two constructs leads to an unfortunate emphasis on the negative and scant mention of the shared or overlapping areas of common thought. We are not here to denigrate the core mission of Princeton University. Indeed we support their mission of excellence in the humanities and sciences. We want Princeton University to succeed. But they need to adjust their mission in order to be a better partner in our community.

Their narrative says that they do enough already. They brought us growth and higher property values so we can all get rich off of our house sales and like addicts hooked to a needle, the pain will go away when you get that closing check; and they say they brought in all of the 750,000 visitors a year they talk about in their

expensive consultant's reports, its ok Bob Durkee said on April 10, in the Trenton Times. “. . . The University draws visitors who boost the Borough's parking revenues and hotel taxes.” Well thanks Bob, but last time I took the pulse of the downtown merchants about this idea, they weren't too pleased! Effectively, the University is saying that if we want to stick our hands in the visitors pockets for a buck and a quarter for a parking meter for two hours, fine, but “don't you dare reach into our pockets you ingrates”.

And our competing narrative runs something like this: Princeton University threw a huge fifty year growth party – it was quite a big bash and like the Reunions that they stage so effectively every year, there was plenty of intoxicant to go around. But now the party is over and we are left with the hangover. It is time to clean up our town after the party and they must contribute as a partner in a measurable way commensurate to their ability to afford to protect their host community from the negative impacts of their growth strategies.

We shouldn't call these payments that they need to make property taxes. We should call them conscience fees.

Thank you.

Kevin Wilkes
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